

THE EBHR TOOLKIT



THE EBHR TOOLKIT INTRODUCTION

Our discussions with HR professionals revealed a strong and widespread desire to make better-informed decisions in order to improve the effectiveness of the function and add greater value to the business. While some progress has been made towards implementing some parts of EBHR there was also a recognition that more could be done.

We also asked what would help HR get better at doing EBHR. The most common suggestion was the provision of simple and practical guidance which HR teams can pick up and immediately use.

This is exactly what the EBHR Toolkit sets out to do.

As a reminder, the logic of EBHR is that the effectiveness of the HR function is increased by using the best available evidence to more precisely identify the most important business problems (or opportunities) and then doing the same to identify solutions (or interventions) that are most likely to be effective. This process allows us to get much better answers to two key questions:

- 1 What's going on?
- 2 And, what can we do about it?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

? Do we need to apply EBHR to everything we do?

No. Sometimes it's not appropriate or just not possible. A [checklist](#) for helping you decide when to apply it is in this Toolkit.

? Is it necessary to follow every single part of the process?

No. There may be practical constraints which mean you cannot follow the whole process and also good reasons why you should not follow the whole process. This is about making a better-informed decision, so even following parts of the process will help.

? Is it necessary to gather evidence from all four sources?

No. There may be practical constraints which mean you cannot get evidence from all the sources and good reasons why you do not need evidence from all four. This is about making a better-informed decision so even if you do not use evidence from all sources, using evidence from some will still help.

? What about things like experiments, innovation, trying new or 'cutting-edge' ideas? Where do they fit with EBHR?

Each of these approaches can be useful but only when the EBHR process has been completed and there is a clear need for an experiment or to innovate or to try new ideas. The EBHR process provides a good understanding of the problem or opportunity and a good understanding of possible solutions or interventions. An experiment may be useful to compare two or more possible solutions when it remains unclear which is likely to be more effective based on the evidence we have. We may choose to innovate when the evidence suggests that all the possible solutions identified are likely to be ineffective. We may try new or 'cutting edge' ideas when all the available approaches or ways of thinking about tackling the problem appear, based on the available evidence, to be unhelpful. However, we should still choose a new idea based on evidence. Also, most new or 'cutting edge' ideas turn out to be fads. A [checklist](#) to help you identify likely fads is available in this Toolkit.

? What about evaluation of interventions and calculating ROI?

These are both important HR activities which are only useful when the EBHR process has been completed. The choice of intervention or practice should be based on evidence which provides a good understanding of the problem and a good understanding of the likely most effective solution. It is simply not possible to evaluate an intervention without first specifying the goal of the intervention or the exact problem it aims to fix. Similarly, with ROI we need to be precise about what returns we are expecting the investment to bring. In other words, both evaluation and ROI depend on well-informed decisions about the problem and the solution.

? Should we integrate it with our team project planning?

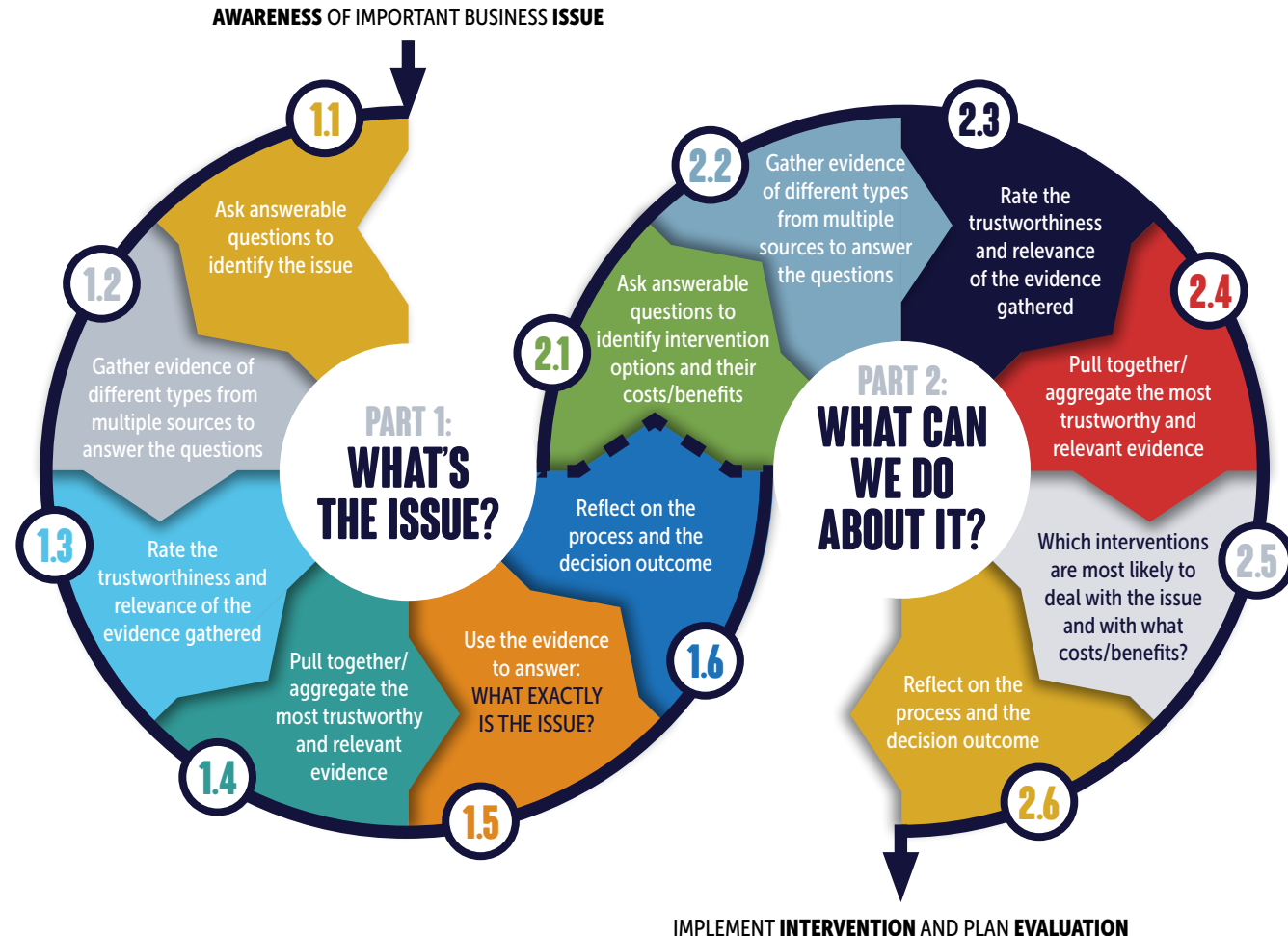
Yes. Particularly when the project is large and important to the goals of the business. By integrating EBHR with the project plan it's possible to make sure enough of the right resources are available at each stage of the project and different members of the team are allocated particular tasks. This Toolkit contains an [EBHR Process Model](#) and a [Sources of Evidence Framework](#) which can be integrated with or used to shape the project planning.

1.1 THE EBHR PROCESS

EBHR is a two-part process. The first part helps us make better-informed decisions about what are important problems/opportunities for the business. The second, if the problems are clearly identified, helps us to make better-informed decisions about solutions/interventions.

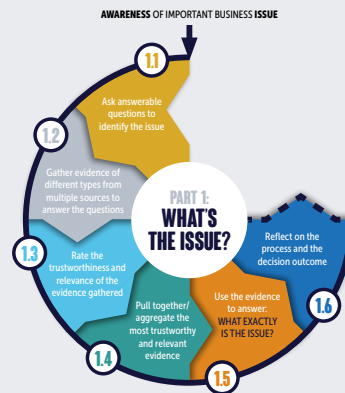
Adopting a structured and explicit process is one of the three main principles of EBHR.

The goals of the business will most strongly determine the importance of the problem/opportunity. These are best thought of as, presenting problems, in that they require further investigation and more precise definition. This is the purpose of Part 1 of the Model. Part 2 deals with how we can go about identifying the most likely solutions.



1.2 QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR EACH STAGE OF THE PROCESS

Here, using the example of a presenting business problem of **high employee turnover**, we provide some examples of the questions and activities that help you move through the process to make better-informed judgements about both the problem and potential solutions.



EBHR PROCESS PART 1: WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

1.1 Ask answerable questions to identify the issue

- What exactly is the presenting problem of 'high employee turnover'? Why is it a problem?
- Where in the business is turnover happening?
- Who is leaving?
- What is the turnover rate?
- Are there any identifiable trends?
- How does the turnover rate compare to similar organisations?
- Why in general is turnover a problem? Why is it a problem for us here? What are the consequences?
- What explains our turnover?

1.2 Gather evidence of different types from multiple sources (see [Evidence Sources Framework](#)) to answer the questions

- Look across the four sources to collect evidence that will help you to answer the questions and so more precisely understand the nature of the problem of 'high turnover'.
- Start by gathering evidence to answer your questions from stakeholders – particularly the senior management team, line managers and employees – then move on to the other three sources.
- Devise a method for recording and storing the evidence you collect that's accessible to the whole team.

1.3 Rate the trustworthiness and relevance of the evidence gathered (see [Evidence Quality and Relevance Framework](#))

- Do we understand the evidence we have gathered?
- How was it gathered?
- Is it likely to be biased or incomplete and in which ways?
- How credible is each source and how do we know?
- Given our questions, which evidence is most trustworthy?
- Given our questions, which evidence is most relevant to our particular context?
- Which evidence should we definitely use, possibly use, and definitely not use?

1.4 Pull together/aggregate the most trustworthy and relevant evidence

- Go back to the questions asked to help identify the presenting problem of 'high turnover':
 - Where is the business is turnover happening?
 - Who is leaving?
 - What is the turnover rate?
 - How does the turnover rate compare to similar organisations?
 - Why in general is turnover a problem? Why is it a problem for us here? What are the consequences?
 - What explains our turnover?
- Pull together the most trustworthy and relevant evidence from each of the sources that answers each question.
- Display or summarise the evidence that answers each of the questions about 'high turnover'.

1.5 Use the evidence to answer: WHAT EXACTLY IS THE ISSUE?

- Given the available evidence what is the most accurate answer to each question?
- Returning to the starting point, what exactly is the presenting problem of 'high employee turnover'? Why is it a problem?
- Is there one discrete problem or several?
- How serious are the turnover problems for the business? Do we need to intervene?

1.6 Reflect on the process and the decision outcome

- How easy or difficult was the process?
- Which parts were completed more or less fully and why?
- How do you feel about gaps?
- How did following the process change your initial perceptions of the problem(s)?
- How confident are you that you have an accurate picture the turnover problem(s)?
- How would you do it differently next time?

EBHR PROCESS PART 2: WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?



2.1 Ask answerable questions to identify intervention options and their costs/benefits

- Given the turnover problem(s) identified in Part 1, what techniques are most likely to be effective and will they be effective here?
- What are the goals of our solutions? What exactly are we trying to achieve in relation to reducing turnover?
- What are the benefits and costs/risks? What is the likely return on investment of potential solutions?
- Are there possible unintended negative consequences of potential solutions?
- How will we evaluate to find out if our goals have been achieved?

2.2 Gather evidence of different types from multiple sources (see [Evidence Sources Framework](#)) to answer the questions

- Look across the four sources to collect evidence that will help you to more precisely identify a range of possible solutions and understand which are more likely to work.
- Start by gathering evidence to answer your questions from stakeholders – particularly the senior management team, line managers and employees – then move on to the other three sources.
- Devise a method for recording and storing the evidence you collect that's accessible to the whole team.

2.3 Rate the trustworthiness and relevance of the evidence gathered (see [Evidence Quality and Relevance Framework](#))

- Do we understand the evidence we have gathered?
- How was it gathered?
- Is it likely to be biased or incomplete and in which ways?
- How credible is each source and how do we know?
- Given our questions, which evidence is most trustworthy?
- Given our questions, which evidence is most relevant to our particular context?
- Which evidence should we definitely use, possibly use, and definitely not use?

2.4 Pull together/aggregate the most trustworthy and relevant evidence

- Go back to the questions asked to help identify solutions to the problem of 'high turnover':
 - Given the turnover problem(s) identified in Part 1, what solutions are most likely to be effective?
 - What are the goals of our solutions? What exactly are we trying to achieve in relation to reducing turnover?
 - What are the benefits and costs? What is the likely return on investment of potential solutions?
 - Are there possible unintended negative consequences or risks?
 - What techniques can be used to reduce turnover, how effective are they and will they be effective here?
 - How can the intervention be implemented here?
 - What is likely to happen to the turnover if we do nothing?
- Pull together the most trustworthy and relevant evidence from each of the sources that answers each question.
- Display or summarise the evidence that answers each of the questions about potential solutions.

2.5 Which interventions are most likely to deal with the issue and with what costs/benefits?

- Given the available evidence, what is the most accurate answer to each question?
- Returning to the starting point and given the turnover problem(s) identified in Part 1, what techniques are most likely to be effective and will they be effective here?
- Is there one discrete goal for our interventions or several? How can we evaluate whether goals are met?
- Which solutions are most effective and cost effective?
- Is a single or multiple solutions required?
- What about unintended consequences or risks and how can they be managed?

2.6 Reflect on the process and the decision outcome

- How easy or difficult was the process?
- Which parts were completed more or less fully and why?
- How do you feel about gaps?
- How did following the process change your initial perceptions of potential solutions?
- How confident are you that you have an accurate picture of which solutions to use?
- How would you do it differently next time?






1.3

WHEN SHOULD WE USE (AND NOT USE) EBHR?

EBHR serves a vital role in increasing the effectiveness of the HR function to help the business achieve its goals. However, this does not mean we should *always* adopt this approach to every problem and in every situation.

WHEN SHOULD WE USE EBHR?

These are the situational factors we should take into account when deciding to use EBHR. If the answer to most of these questions is 'yes' then it makes sense to adopt EBHR for this particular issue. If the answers to most of these questions is 'no' then EBHR is probably not necessary.

-  **Importance:** Is this issue crucial to the objectives of the business?
-  **Resources:** Will dealing with this issue be costly in relation to time, people, money, other resources?
-  **Risk:** If we get this wrong could it have serious legal or other types of consequences for the business?
-  **Accountability:** Will we be asked at some point in the future to provide an audit trail showing the evidence we used to identify the issue and the way we chose to deal with it?
-  **Ethics:** Do we have an ethical responsibility to make careful, well-informed decisions about the exact nature of this issue and what we can do about it? Do we have a duty of care?

WHEN SHOULD WE NOT USE EBHR?

In general, we should not use EBHR if we have no or little opportunity to make well-informed decisions about the issue and possible solutions. In other words, when we can't really choose what to do. This can happen for two main reasons:

- 1** The first is **compliance**. For a variety of reasons, we may simply have to implement a policy or practice because we are required to do so.
- 2** The second involves **timing**. When it's just too late to start the EBHR process because decisions have already been made which can't be changed regarding the nature of the issue and/or which solution should be implemented.

1.4 STARTING THE EBHR PROCESS: WHAT EXACTLY IS A BUSINESS ISSUE?

The EBHR process always starts with a business issue. Why? Because it's only by focusing on what's important to the business that HR can become more effective in helping the business achieve its objectives.


But what exactly is (and is not) a business issue? And how can we know?

WHAT IS A BUSINESS ISSUE?


A business issue is any challenge or opportunity faced by the business which has direct and significant implications for crucial outcomes for the business such as:

- Performance (financial, ESG)
- Size (growth, size stability, size reduction)
- Survival

In other words, **a business issue is something that is likely to affect the goals or objectives of the business.**

 Business issues may also **be linked to the current strategic imperatives of the business** such as:

- Innovation
- Cost reduction
- Quality enhancement
- Customer service
- Flexibility

 Another way of identifying a business issue is to ask and gather evidence to answer the following question:

If we choose to ignore this how likely is it to have negative consequences for the objectives of our business?


If the answer is *'quite or very likely'* then it is probably a business issue that deserves our attention.

WHAT IS NOT A BUSINESS ISSUE?


As noted earlier, there are many HR activities that are required but not directly connected to business goals or outcomes. Examples of such activities include those that are necessary to meet legal obligations or for operational reasons, for example:

- Payroll
- Processing job applicants

These are important activities but not business issues.

 There are *other* issues that are not business issues that **may attract HR's attention and sometimes shape HR activity** such as:

- Identifying then simply copying the HR practices of other organisations.
- Reading then implementing the advice of business gurus and thought leaders.
- Adopting HR fads and fashions (see [Fad Detector](#)).
- Complying with insistent demands from senior stakeholders to implement a particular practice or policy.

 Another way of identifying a *non-business* issue is to ask and gather evidence to answer the following question:

If we choose to ignore this how likely is it to have negative consequences for the objectives of our business?

If the answer is *'quite or very unlikely'* or *'we have no way of knowing'* then it is probably not a business issue which deserves our attention.

1.5

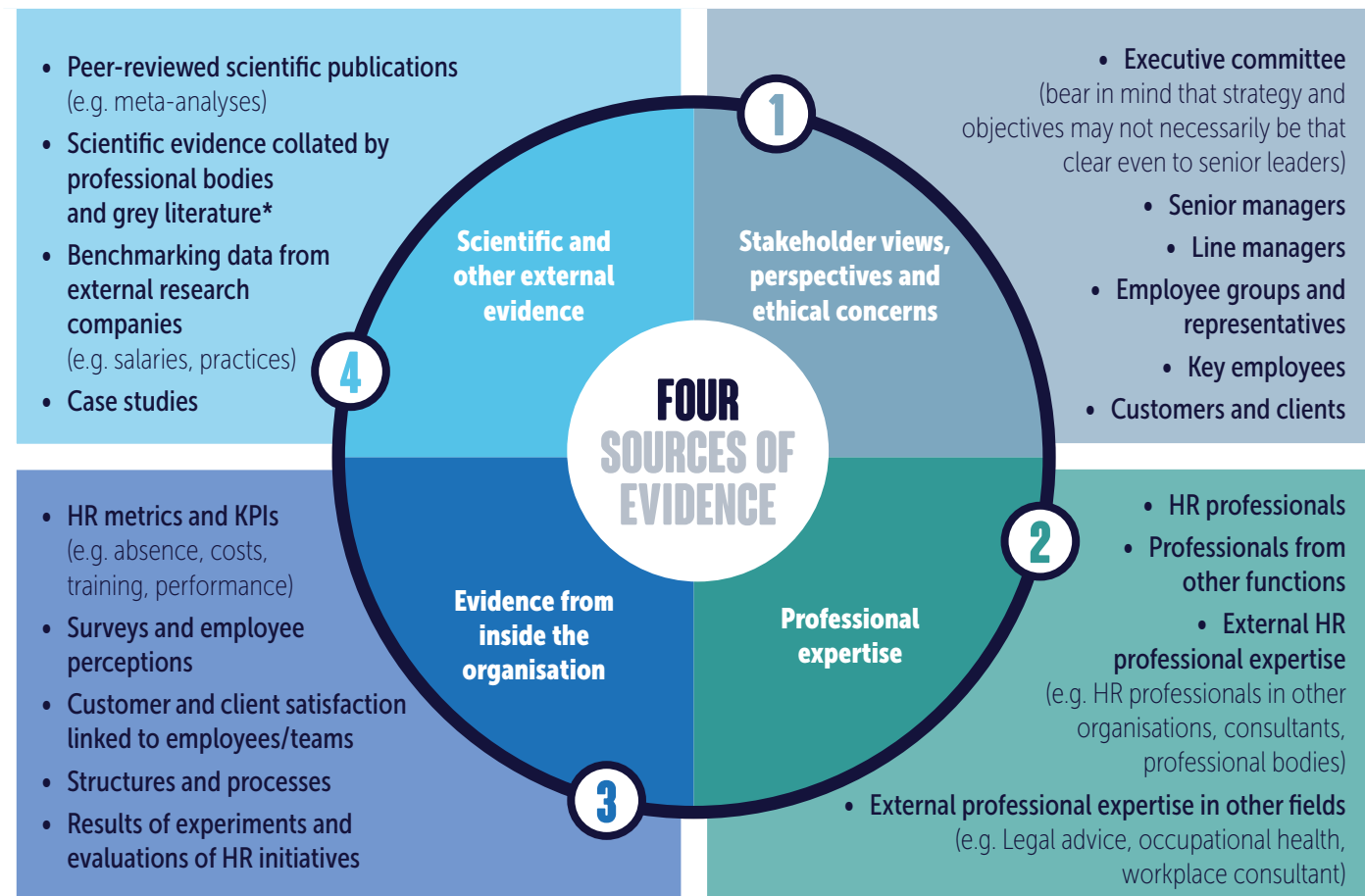
SOURCES OF EVIDENCE FRAMEWORK

EBHR draws on four main sources of evidence. Examples of the types of evidence and information found in each source are provided in the Framework.

Incorporating multiple sources and types of evidence and information is one of the three main principles of EBHR.

EBHR is about answering questions to make better-informed decisions. Therefore, we need to search for evidence that best answers our questions. Some sources or types of evidence will be more or less relevant depending on the question we are asking.

***Grey literature** refers to information produced by a range of organisations which is not part of commercial publishing in that publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body. For example, white papers produced by consultancies.



1.6

CHECKLIST FOR RATING THE TRUSTWORTHINESS AND RELEVANCE OF EVIDENCE

EBHR is not about using *all* the available evidence, but rather focusing on the most trustworthy and relevant evidence. This helps to avoid the *garbage in, garbage out* problem. Trustworthy means that we have good reasons to believe the evidence is reasonably accurate. Relevant means the evidence actually answers the questions we are asking and applies to our organisation and context.

Focusing on the most trustworthy and relevant evidence is one of the three main principles of EBHR.

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU THAT...	NOT VERY CONFIDENT	SOMEWHAT CONFIDENT	VERY CONFIDENT
You understand <i>how</i> the evidence was collected?	1	2	3
You understand <i>what</i> the evidence is telling you in relation to your question?	1	2	3
The evidence can in principle provide an answer to your question?	1	2	3
The evidence is largely <i>unbiased</i> (e.g. not under- or over-estimating)?	1	2	3
The evidence is largely <i>error-free</i> ?	1	2	3

SCORING KEY

The lowest possible score for relevance and trustworthiness is 5 and the maximum possible score is 15.

RED ZONE
Between 5-7
 probably not relevant and trustworthy
 do not use

AMBER ZONE
Between 8-11
 probably relevant and trustworthy
 do use but with caution

GREEN ZONE
Between 12-15
 likely relevant and trustworthy
 do use

1.7 BIAS CHECKER

We all have biases that can strongly shape the way we see things. Although it's very difficult to remove bias completely it is possible to reflect on whether we are likely to be biased and to take steps, such as asking other people or looking for more evidence, to help reduce the impact of biases.

It is worth reflecting both individually and as a team how you scored on this Bias Checker and why. It may also be useful to ask members of the team to rate each other on these questions as well as self-rate.

Some ways of managing bias in the EBHR process with the team include:

- Discussing with project team members about what each feels the problem and solution may be *before* you start collecting evidence.
- Specifying and agreeing in *advance* what evidence will be collect to answer the questions.
- Team members can ask each other if they can see any potential biases in the way they are going about the EBHR process. In general, we are much better at spotting other people's biases than we are at spotting our own.
- Actively seeking disconfirming evidence.
- Monitoring the feelings of team members as the questions start to be answered by the evidence. For example, are people rather disappointed or particularly pleased by the answers? Such feelings *may* indicate pre-existing bias.

THINKING ABOUT HOW YOU WENT ABOUT THE EBHR PROCESS... ANSWER:	I WAS DOING THIS	I WAS POSSIBLY DOING THIS	I WAS NOT DOING THIS
Were you confident you <i>already knew</i> what the problem (or opportunity) was <i>before</i> you started collecting evidence?	2	1	0
Were you confident you <i>already knew</i> which solution (or intervention) was likely to work <i>before</i> you started collecting evidence?	2	1	0
While gathering evidence, were you at any point aware that you were trying to find evidence that supported views you already held?	2	1	0
While gathering evidence, were you at any point trying to ignore evidence which contradicted views you already held?	2	1	0
Do you feel you had a vested interest in finding a particular answer to your question? Did you hope that the evidence would provide the answer you wanted to find?	2	1	0
Were you prepared to change your mind about the problem or solution depending on the evidence obtained?	0	1	2

SCORING KEY
The lowest possible score is zero (indicating that you feel you were relatively unbiased) and the maximum possible score is 10 (indicating you feel you were relatively biased).

BIAS ZONE
If you scored two or more
 it indicates you may have been somewhat biased in the way you collected and evaluated evidence on this particular occasion.

1.8 FAD DETECTOR CHECKLIST

HR fads are new (or presented as such) 'cutting edge' ideas and techniques. Typically, they are quickly and widely-adopted and often dropped just as quickly when it's realised they are not having the desired effect and are then replaced by the next latest idea.

Quite reasonably, HR professionals often wonder if 'the latest thing' they've just read or heard about is just a fad or something more valuable.

Drawing on Miller and Hartwick (2002) here is a list of red flags for fads. If most of these apply to a new idea or technique it means that idea is most likely a fad and should be avoided.

RED FLAGS FOR FADS

Fads are a very important barrier to EBHR in two key ways.






- 1 First, they **distract** HR's attention and energy away from its core task: adding value by making well-informed decisions about the most important business issues HR needs to tackle, and implementing solutions that are most likely to work.
- 2 Second, because fads are by definition new, they are the practices for which there is currently the **least evidence**. While some fads stand the test of time, most do not, hence following fads is bad for the HR function and the business.

- Attractive** – they are appealing, people like them and really want to apply them.
- Simple** – quickly understood.
- Prescriptive** – tell you what you should do.
- Falsely encouraging** – promise to have strong panacea-like effects on a very wide range of HR and business outcomes.
- One-size-fits-all** – they work everywhere in any context.
- Easy to cut-and-paste** – can be quickly partially implemented.
- In tune with the zeitgeist** – fit with current ideas.
- Novel, not radical** – they *sound* new but usually only superficially different to what's gone before.
- Legitimised by gurus, disciples and 'cool' organisations** – their credibility comes from the opinions of influencers, their followers and unscientific examples from current superstar businesses rather than a reasonable quantity of good quality evidence.
- FOMO-inducing** – the idea of *not* following the fad creates a Fear of Missing Out or somehow falling behind others.
- Without focused purpose** – the question '*for which problem is this practice the answer?*' can be difficult to answer if the practice is a fad.

1.9 IN A NUTSHELL: AN EBHR CHEAT SHEET CHECKLIST

EVIDENCE-BASED HR?

1 The two-part EBHR process is detailed and takes time and, as discussed in the [When should we use \(and not use\) EBHR?](#) section of the EBHR Toolkit, it makes sense to follow the process as much as possible if you answer 'yes' to most of these questions:

-  **Importance:** Is this issue crucial to the objectives of the business?
-  **Resources:** Will dealing with this issue be costly in relation to time, people, money, other resources?
-  **Risk:** If we get this wrong could it have serious legal or other types of consequences for the business?
-  **Accountability:** Will we be asked at some point in the future to provide an audit trail showing the evidence we used to identify the issue and the way we chose to deal with it?
-  **Ethics:** Do we have an ethical responsibility to make careful, well-informed decisions about the exact nature of this issue and what we can do about it? Do we have a duty of care?

But what about a situation in which it seems somewhat appropriate to use EBHR but it is not quite clear whether we can or need to follow the whole process?

Is there a way of following some parts of the process but not in as much depth or detail? Can we quickly check the extent to which we are following (or not) the basics of EBHR in a current project?

The answer is 'yes' – so long as we remember the three principles of EBHR.

2 The three principles of EBHR:

- PRINCIPLE 1** Incorporate multiple sources and types of evidence and information
- PRINCIPLE 2** Adopt a structured and explicit process of gathering and using evidence
- PRINCIPLE 3** Focus on the most trustworthy and relevant evidence

Here are five questions based on these principles designed to help you follow some aspects of the EBHR process. This is useful if you don't have much time or are unsure whether it's necessary to follow the full process.

EBHR CHEAT SHEET CHECKLIST

EBHR CHEAT SHEET CHECKLIST

The purpose of this Cheat Sheet Checklist is to ask you to rate a number of questions. Your answers will help you identify the extent which to you are adopting something like an EBHR approach in your current project or activity and help you reflect on whether you can and should do more. Thinking about your current project, consider your answers to each of these questions.

A Thinking carefully about what you *actually did* in this project, how accurate is this description of you and/or your team's behaviour?

We started with a clear and important business issue.



Not at all accurate

Completely accurate

B Thinking carefully about what you *actually did* in this project, how accurate is this description of you and/or your team's behaviour?

We asked and then answered focused questions to first identify the problem.



Not at all accurate

Completely accurate

C Thinking carefully about what you *actually did* in this project, how accurate is this description of you and/or your team's behaviour?

We asked and then answered focused questions to identify possible solutions.



Not at all accurate

Completely accurate

D Thinking carefully about what you *actually did* in this project, how accurate is this description of you and/or your team's behaviour?

We answered all our questions by gathering evidence from a range of sources (at least 3-4) and of different types.



Not at all accurate

Completely accurate

E Thinking carefully about what you *actually did* in this project, how accurate is this description of you and/or your team's behaviour?

We explicitly considered the relevance and trustworthiness of the evidence.



Not at all accurate

Completely accurate

SCORING KEY

Add up the percentages you rated your behaviour for each of the five questions. The maximum possible total score is **500**.

If your score is less than 350 (equating to an average of less than **30%** on each question) then it's possible to conclude that **your behaviours are NOT strongly reflecting those we would expect to see in an EBHR project.**

If your score is 350 or over (equating to an average of more than **70%** on each question) then it's possible to conclude that **your behaviours ARE strongly reflecting those we would expect to see in an EBHR project.**

How to improve your score on each question.



How to improve your score on each question.

If you want to improve your overall score for this project, look at the scores for each question and consider changing your behaviours in the way suggested to improve the score on that item.



We started with a clear and important business issue.

To improve your score on this item consider:

- Reading this section in the EBHR Toolkit to develop your understanding of what *is* and *is not* a business issue: [Starting the EBHR Process: What Exactly is a Business Issue?](#)
- Looking at the issue you started with and unpacking it by asking more questions such as: what exactly is this issue? Is it one or many issues? Do senior stakeholders (e.g. leaders) believe this to be an issue?
- Identifying whether it is a business issue or another type of issue (e.g. compliance) which is not really appropriate for an EBHR project.



We asked and then answered focused questions to *first* identify the problem.

To improve your score on this item consider:

- Reading this section in the EBHR Toolkit: [The EBHR Process](#).
- Reading this section in the EBHR Toolkit: [Questions and Activities for Each Stage of the Process Part 1: What's the Issue?](#)
- Reviewing the questions and answers you already have to identify key gaps.
- Designing and answering more probing questions to identify the problem.



We asked and then answered focused questions to identify possible solutions.

To improve your score on this item consider:

- Reading this section in the EBHR Toolkit: [The EBHR Process](#).
- Reading this section in the EBHR Toolkit: [Questions and Activities for Each Stage of the Process Part 2: What Can we Do About It?](#)
- Reviewing the questions and answers you already have to identify key gaps.
- Designing and answering more probing questions to identify the problem.



We answered all our questions by gathering evidence from a range of sources (at least 3-4) and of different types.

To improve your score on this item consider:

- Reading this section in the EBHR Toolkit: [Sources of Evidence Framework](#).
- Identify which sources you did not use so much and go back and try to answer your questions from 2 and 3 by drawing on the underused sources.
- Identify which types of evidence you did not use so much and go back and try to answer your questions from 2 and 3 by drawing on the underused types.



We explicitly considered the relevance and trustworthiness of the evidence.

To improve your score on this item consider:

- Reading this section in the EBHR Toolkit: [Checklist for Rating the Trustworthiness and Relevance of Evidence](#).
- Going back to the evidence you have already collected and rating the most important parts of evidence for their trustworthiness or relevance.
- Focusing more on evidence which seems trustworthy and using it to help inform your decisions.
- Focusing less on or ignoring evidence which seems less trustworthy and relevant and avoid using it to help inform your decisions.